**[My view: Starting the school year on the right foot](http://schoolsofthought.blogs.cnn.com/2012/08/15/my-view-starting-the-school-year-on-the-right-foot/" \o "Permanent Link:My view: Starting the school year on the right foot)**

By **Harry and Rosemary Wong**, Special to CNN August 15, 2012

***Editor’s note:*** *Harry and Rosemary Wong are authors of* [*“The First Days of School: How to Be an Effective Teacher.”*](http://www.effectiveteaching.com/) *Harry is the recipient of the National Teachers Hall of Fame Lifetime Achievement Award, and Rosemary is the recipient of the Louisiana State University College of Education’s Distinguished Alumnus Award.*

**(CNN)** - One of the most misunderstood terms in education is “classroom management,” which is often seen as a synonym for discipline. Imagine asking the manager of a store to explain his job and he says, “My job is to discipline the customers.” And when the same question is posed to the manager of a team, she says, “I discipline the players.” Yet, discipline is the prevailing response of most educators when asked about classroom management.

Discipline is a reactive action used to stop deviant behavior and has nothing to do with student learning. Classroom management is a means of organizing, structuring and planning events to get things DONE in the classroom that will lead to student learning. Creating a well-managed classroom is the priority of a teacher the first two weeks of school.  
  
This is accomplished by establishing procedures for how to get things done in the classroom. These procedures over time are carried out automatically and become routines and thus establish a culture of consistency in how the classroom is run. It’s like learning to ride a bicycle. Someone has to teach you how first, but once you know and are successful at it, you just hop on the bike and, without thinking about it, ride away.

Students respond positively to consistency, just as people like consistency when they buy a product, frequent a store or go to the dentist.

Students want a classroom environment that is safe, predictable, nourishing and trusting, and trusting comes from the surety of consistency. They want to come each day and know what is going to happen in their classroom.

On any given day when 1.5 million students come to school from a homeless situation, when 8,000 kids are reported to public agencies as having been abused or neglected, and when 250,000 kids refuse to come to school for fear of being bullied, these are the very students who do not want surprises or people yelling at them simply because they do not know what is happening. Effective teachers spend the first few days of the new school year removing any mystery, by teaching students how the class is organized for their learning success.

Nickolas Jahner, a student in Olathe, Kansas, says, “In my high school classrooms, we would sit around chatting and waiting until the teacher was ready to start. There was one notable exception – My fabulous biology teacher had the agenda and a bellwork assignment posted so we would start working immediately.”

Jahner was referring to his biology teacher, Karen Rogers, who knows that organization in the first week is the foundation for a successful school year. Her agenda tells students what the plan for learning is during their time together and includes a bellwork assignment—an activity to engage the students in learning the moment they enter the classroom.

She loves to tell everyone that her classroom has to be well-managed or “I will be chasing after the kids all year long. I love the first few days and weeks of school. When adults walk into my classroom, they are amazed that my students all know what to do, when to do it, and how to do it.”

Rogers meticulously plans for her very first day of school and the first two weeks of school. Just as a football coach scripts the first 10 to 20 plays, Rogers has her first day plan on a clipboard. As each item is shared with the class, she checks it off.

For her first day of school, she writes out where she is going to stand to welcome her students. She has her seating chart done. She has an opening bellwork assignment posted. She has all the classroom procedures spelled out to present to the class with a worksheet for student response. She even has her welcome speech written out to explain her plan. With a plan, she takes away all the anxieties that would prevent her from focusing on her students and their success. She has no fears because she knows what is going to happen in her classroom.

Rogers’ classroom management plan has procedures that provide the framework for the consistency her students need. Each day her students can expect:

– An agenda with a schedule and bellwork assignment so they can get right to work.  
– Procedures that help them organize their day.  
– Lesson objectives and rubrics to guide them in their learning.

Her students thrive with the structure and routine. They feel comfortable and safe in the reliability of the classroom practices. Her ELL, SPED and ADHD students function well in the predictability of a classroom when there are no surprises or sudden changes.

Ponder these idioms: “Start off on the right foot.” and “Get all your ducks in a row.” When applied to the classroom, they refer to procedures used to organize the first week of school. Procedures are the foundation for how successful the school year will be for everyone involved. With a classroom management plan, you can connect with students to convey that you are caring and competent person and you have a plan for their success.

As you start each period, each day, and each year please remember that one of the most important gifts you can give your students is to be consistent and predictable. Many students come from homes where chaos and unpredictability are the norm.

You can provide a place for students that is safe, predictable, consistent and nurturing. Research shows that providing such an environment for students will increase achievement.

Each month on our web site, we feature a teacher who has a well-managed classroom. We have more than 100 articles about great teachers, and this month, we share the classroom management plan of first year teacher, [Kara Moore of Ohio](http://teachers.net/wong/AUG12/). She had a horrible problem at the end of her first year. She couldn’t say good-bye to her students because her school year went so amazingly well.

We hope you have the same problem this school year.

*The opinions expressed in this commentary are solely those of Harry and Rosemary Wong.*